

REMARKS AS DELIVERED

Remarks by U.S. Senator Joe Donnelly
Maiden Address
United States Senate Chamber
Washington, D.C.
Wednesday, April 24, 2013

SEN. DONNELLY: Madam President.

SEN. BALDWIN: Senator from Indiana.

SEN. DONNELLY: Madam President, one of the best parts of this job is getting the chance to talk to Hoosiers here in Washington, back home in Indiana, and on those special occasions, a chance to see our Hoosiers when they are serving our country overseas.

When I was visiting our servicemembers in Afghanistan in Khost Province in July 2009, I asked our Indiana National Guard members if there was one thing I could do for them --What would that be?

I expected them to tell me about safety vests or new trucks. And they said, "Joe, we have this handled here. What we need more than anything is a chance to have a job when we get home."

We owe our service members that opportunity.

From Hoosiers serving our nation in Afghanistan and around the world to the communities of Vincennes and Madison and Plymouth and Gary, the message is the same everywhere: It's about jobs and the chance to go to work and to take care of your family.

So how do we take a Hoosier common sense approach, focus on jobs and create the conditions needed for our people and our businesses to succeed?

I propose an opportunity agenda. Government doesn't create jobs—businesses create jobs. So let's create the opportunities, help put the conditions for our businesses in Indiana and around the country to be able to create more jobs, put the programs in place for all the American people to be ready to hit the ground running on day one.

Because Madam President, If we don't have a job, nothing else works. We can talk about health care. We can talk about climate change. We can talk about any other issue, but if we do not have the chance to go to work and earn a living and take care of our family, nothing else works.

That's why earlier this month, I conducted a series of roundtable meetings in eight different Hoosier communities trying to get ideas from Hoosier businesses, community leaders, and educators asking one, simple question: How can we help you, our entrepreneurs, our small business owners, the our men and women who go to work everyday—how can we help you create more jobs?

So in creating an opportunity agenda built on Hoosier common sense, I heard loud and clear the place to start is with education and with training.

In every community I went to, I heard about the skills gap: jobs that are currently going unfilled. Opportunities that are there for the taking but we have to have workers that have the skills our employers need. Getting a job is a two way street. Both Hoosier companies and Hoosier workers have responsibilities. You can't expect a good job and good pay if you don't bring some skills to the table.

I heard from a welding trainer in Gary, from an IT company in Noblesville, and from rural health care providers in Terre Haute, Indiana and the message was the same. It resonates across the board and across the state: Employers need more

skilled workers. Good skills equal good jobs. That's why I helped introduce the bipartisan AMERICA Works Act, which modifies federal training programs to place a priority on those programs and those certifications demanded by today's businesses and today's industries.

The improvements in this bill are a benefit for both workers and employers. Workers would know that the time they spend training is more likely to lead to a good job. And for employers, they'll be more likely to hire people who they know have the training they need to be productive the moment they walk in the door.

We also have to make sure our businesses do not get overwhelmed by regulations. In Fort Wayne, I heard about businesses dealing with too many regulations that don't make any sense for their particular industry. It's time to get rid of the bureaucratic mess and to keep what works.

Regulations should be like the umpire on the field: make sure everyone is playing by the rules, make sure that the rules are common sense, and then stay in the background. Regulations should protect the health and safety of our families and our workers while not creating unnecessary burdens for our business owners. Further, the regulatory system should give businesses the certainty they need to plan for the future and the ability to compete with anyone, anywhere in the world.

We need to go all-in on American energy. This helps our businesses, helps our families, and helps national security. I was in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, a beautiful town right along the Ohio River, and when I was there, one of the companies located there, a trucking company – they're trying to turn their fleet into a natural gas fleet. They were interested in making that transition, but the front-end costs are high and the infrastructure isn't in place yet. So developing American energy sources makes sense for American business, it makes sense for American families, and it makes sense for national security.

Let's keep more of our hard-earned dollars in Indiana, or Madam President, in your home state of Wisconsin by investing in homegrown energy: solar, coal, wind, oil, natural gas, biodiesel, ethanol, nuclear. We are blessed with an abundance of energy right here in America. It makes us stronger, creates jobs, reduces our debt, and gives us a chance to make our nation safer. I support projects like the Keystone XL pipeline because it creates jobs, puts people to work, and has significant bipartisan support. That's an example of a common sense investment in domestic energy that both sides of the aisle can support.

These are just a few of the ideas I've gotten from the people who are creating jobs, running businesses, meeting payroll, employing our neighbors, and growing our businesses all across Indiana.

There is more a whole lot more wisdom, Madam President, in Washington, Indiana than in Washington, D.C. A big reason for this is because Hoosiers, like many Americans, are focused on just getting things done, working together. It's not about partisanship and it's not about politics. In Indiana, it's about common sense and trying to solve the problem. It's about an opportunity agenda that creates jobs for hard working people and a good life for their families. That's what it's all about.

And here's what I'm about: Taking the best ideas from both parties, both sides of this chamber, and getting things done – starting with jobs. As Hoosiers, we don't care if you're a Democrat, we don't care if you're a Republican; we care if you're ready to work on what matters most. We make decisions based on what is best for our families. We take pride in making the checkbook balance and making the tough choices necessary to make that possible.

We expect the same from our government. Keep taxes low, cut waste, and don't throw more money at the problem—just try to solve the problem. Hoosiers are hard working. We don't want a free lunch; we just want a fair shake. We believe that respect is earned through the sweat and a hard work that you put in every single day. We don't expect to receive anything that we haven't earned.

Hoosier common sense tells us our families are all better off when we have stronger communities and more opportunities for businesses and workers. We take care of our brothers and sisters in need—not with a handout, but by providing them the opportunity to work hard and build a better life.

We have a proud tradition of senators from Indiana who have embodied these principles of Hoosier common sense:

From Senator Lugar's decades of leadership in matters of common sense foreign policy, in his leadership in saving over 100,000 Hoosier auto jobs, and for his constant efforts on behalf of Indiana's farmers from Lake Michigan to the Ohio River.

To Senator Birch Bayh's tireless efforts to expanding voting rights and equality for women through his efforts on Title IV.

To Senator and Vice President Dan Quayle. His bipartisan efforts to pass jobs training legislation.

To Senator Evan Bayh flexing his independence and his passion to get our fiscal house in order.

To my current colleague, Senator Dan Coats. His efforts to keep our nation safe.

The people of Indiana expect their leaders to put Hoosier common sense ahead of partisanship. We expect our senators not to be the loudest people in the building, but the hardest working people in the building.

And in my case, to make my job about making sure I'm looking out for their job.

I am honored to be here in this chamber working every day—not because I work for anyone here. I work for the people back home. That's my mission. That's my job. I'm incredibly privileged to do that. God bless Indiana. God bless the United States. Thank you Madam President, I yield back.